



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: May 26, 2006

To: Members of the Historical Commission

From: Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner

Re: D-1062: 14 Old Dee Road

An application to demolish the roof and remodel the house at 14 Old Dee Road was received on April 25. The applicant was notified of an initial determination of significance on April 28, and a public hearing was scheduled for June 1.

Site

The structure is located on Old Dee Road, a small cul-de-sac between Mount Auburn Street and Larchwood Drive. It is a wood-frame house with wood shingle siding. The assessed value for the land and building (Map 251/Parcel 235) according to the FY2006 property database was \$902,000. The structure is sited on a 7,697 square-foot lot in a Residence A-2 zone. The zone permits an FAR of 0.5 and has a 35' height limit.

The configuration of this lot, and others in the subdivision, is trapezoidal, with narrow frontage and a broader rear yard (somewhat pie-shaped). There are seven houses on this small street. The houses have small front and side setbacks, and some have large rear yards. The lots vary between 6,392 square feet and 16,040. All the houses on Old Dee Road are either one or two stories tall. Two recent demolition permit applications for this small cul-de-sac have been reviewed by the Commission since 2000. Houses at 12 and 18 Old Dee Road have been demolished and new houses built on those lots.

The current proposal is to demolish the hip roof of the existing house, build out the third floor and construct a new flat roof, remodel the front porch and elevations, and re clad the house with cedar, zinc, and copper. The applicant has submitted plan and elevation drawings for the project.

Architectural Description

Designed in 1937 by the architectural firm of Duguid & Martin, the house at 14 Old Dee Road is a two-story, hipped-roof, frame house sided with wood shingles. The house was executed in a transitional style with elements of the Regency Revival and Georgian Revival styles. The street originally had a very interesting balance of architect-designed Colonial Revival style homes and very

modern architectural experiments. This house has a prominent flushboard parapet that rests directly above the second floor windows. The wide proportions of the house, especially the space from the outside edge of the windows and the corner give the perception of a wide corner treatment. The wood shingle siding is either original or a 1950s alteration. Regardless, the house's proportions and stately massing and symmetry convey the characteristics of the Regency period. A revival of the Regency style was a subset of the broader Colonial Revival trend. The Colonial Revival began in this country soon after the centennial celebrations of 1876 and remains a popular style with builders today.



14 Old Dee Rd, Assessor's Online Database, date unknown

The front door of the existing house is located in the center bay of the front façade. The windows are unusually wide, eight-over-eight double hung sash. The fenestration pattern is very symmetrical. The first floor windows on the front façade are flanked by side lights. All the front windows have wood shutters. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The house sits on a low foundation, the material of which was not visible from the street.

Aside from the flushboarded parapet and unusual windows, the house has very little ornament. The shingle siding adds texture to the simple lines of the house. A brick central chimney extends approximately 5' above the top of the hip roof.

From their home office on Dunstable Road, William and Mary Duguid produced more small, high-quality period houses in Cambridge from the late 1920s through 1940 than any other architectural firm. Scottish engineer William Duguid and his wife Mary had built housing for war victims in France during World War I before moving to Cambridge in 1920 and setting up a joint practice in 1925, specializing in Colonial houses. Mary Duguid had studied history at Wellesley College and interior design at the Cambridge School of Architecture. With her sense of history and design, his technical knowledge, and their combined social conscience, the firm was well suited to meet the needs of the small-house market of the 1930s. Their partner, George Martin, died in 1928, but the name of the firm remained unchanged.

Cambridge commissions for the firm included several houses on Grey Gardens East and West, Fayerweather Street, and Old Dee Road, but their most prominent design is at 146 Brattle Street, which is an adaptation of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House that was constructed in 1939. Duguid & Martin's design for 7 Old Dee Road (1937) is one of the few 20th century houses in Cambridge that reflect the simpler houses of the Early Georgian period, a period that seemed to appeal less to revivalists than the High Georgian. Duguid used Colonial precedents only as historical reference points for designs that were otherwise quite modern.

Current Condition

The current condition of the house appears to be very good. The shingles on the house are in excellent condition. The asphalt roof shingles are looking a little tired, but this is perhaps from lichen growth due to the effects of a very dense tree canopy above. The gutters and downspouts have been well maintained. The chimney appears to be in good condition.

History

The house at 14 Old Dee Road was built in a mid-century subdivision of the land of the Harold A. Ryan, Inc. florist and nursery. The nursery property was immediately adjacent to the Larchwood subdivision, which was planned in 1915 and developed primarily in the 1920s.

The land was part of the large estate of John Chipman Gray. The estate was the last large property on Brattle Street to be subdivided for development. The Gray estate consisted of a large mansion, The Larches, and its gardens and out buildings. In 1882, Gray sold of 9-½ acres of land near Mount Auburn Street and the cemetery to Sarah H. Dee, widow of Boston. Sarah H. Dee built a home and greenhouses on the land. The Old Dee House (35 Larchwood Drive) still remains on its original site at the northeast corner of Old Dee Road and Larchwood Drive. The Old Dee House is a very late example of the mansard style.

Three successive plant nurseries made use of the property (581 Mount Auburn Street), which was conveniently sited across the road from the main gate of Mount Auburn Cemetery and adjacent to the reception house of the cemetery at 583 Mount Auburn Street. The first to operate a florist business here was Thomas W. Dee. He was followed by Sidney Hoffman who was in business from about 1905 to 1915. Next came Harold A. Ryan, Inc., a family business that is still in operation today. The business moved from 581 Mount Auburn Street to 2350 Massachusetts Avenue sometime in the mid- to late-1970s.

Harold A. Ryan and his wife, Mary A. Ryan resided at 565 Mount Auburn Street. The company was listed as the owner when the property was subdivided in 1937. Harold A. Ryan built the first two houses on the cul-de-sac, #7 and #14 Old Dee Road, in 1937. An ambitious Garrison Colonial home was built at 19 Old Dee Road in 1940. It was designed by Royal Barry Wills for Robert Sweeney, a local teacher. Harold A. Ryan, Jr. and his wife, Anna L. Ryan built a contemporary home, designed by The Architects Collaborative in 1947, at 18 Old Dee Road. The twin houses at #6 (now #10) and #12 Old Dee Road were built in 1948, and the last original house to be built was a contemporary house

at #11 designed by Arthur H. Brooks, Jr. in 1950. The resident of this home was noted Harvard psychologist B. F. Skinner, who died in 1990.

The original house at 10 Old Dee Road was demolished and an Acorn Structures designed home built there in 1994. 12 Old Dee Road was demolished in 2000, and 18 Old Dee Road was demolished last year. The new house, a contemporary Greek Revival, is almost complete.

The residents of 14 Old Dee Road have included Claude McGahey, a surgeon, and his wife Caroline; Julian Smith, an employee of A.L. Smith Iron Company, and his wife Anita; Benjamin Tillman, a World War II Army veteran, and his wife Elizabeth, and Elizabeth Stearns, a photographer whose studio was located in Harvard Square and shared with Lois M. Bowen.

Significance and Recommendation

The house at 14 Old Dee Road is significant for its Regency Revival architecture, a subtype of the popular Colonial Revival style of residential architecture. The house is also significant for its important associations with the broad architectural, cultural, and economic history of Cambridge and its relation to the Ryan family, which has operated a family florist business since 1915 and was responsible for the 1937 subdivision of the property.

A detailed inspection of the house was not possible. More could be revealed about the current condition of the building. Its potential for renovation is unclear. It is the staff recommendation that the Commission hear testimony from the owners and neighbors and carefully review the plans for replacement construction before making a further determination

cc: Kent & Lori Damon
Duncan MacArthur



Property Map for 14 Old Dee Road

City of Cambridge, Massachusetts

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